



SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK
COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY

Animal-Assisted Therapy Curriculum for Schools

A Collaborative Guide for School Professionals and HABIC Volunteers in School Placements

Updated: Fall 2023 by Kate Miller & Shiloh Dailey

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Melissa Winkle

Melissa Winkle has revolutionized animal-assisted therapies through Occupational Therapy and series of books centered around the professional applications of animal-assisted interventions. It is with gratitude that we continue to use her thoughtful formatting to include aspects in our interventions including modifications of activities, precautions, dog perspectives, and needed dog skills.

Terry Ryan

Terry Ryan has been at the forefront of animal-assisted interventions since the beginning of field and is a leader in the world of dog training. Her unique abilities to “gamify” training and activities has continued to inspire an element of gameplay in all of our activities.

Intended Audience

All practitioners of animal-assisted interventions and indeed all animal lovers are encouraged to enjoy this document. However, the implementation of animal-assisted therapies should be done thoughtfully and with appropriate training. This document is designed for a HABIC-certified school professional and HABIC-certified volunteer animal handler to use as a team.

School Professionals

This document is intended for school professionals who have mastered the necessary competencies in their field. This document assumes that school professionals using this document have completed training with Human-Animal Bond in Colorado including understanding how animal-assisted therapies are designed, the roles of all parties involved, and how to advocate for both the student and the animal. School professionals are responsible for student selection, setting goals, and documenting progress toward those goals.

Volunteer Animal Handlers and Animals

This document assumes that the volunteer animal handlers and animals are certified through Human-Animal Bond in Colorado. Certification includes an information session, behavior screening of the animal, medical screening of the animal, 12-week training course, and final evaluation. Volunteer animal handlers are assumed to have a firm understanding of animal training, behavior, and how to advocate for the comfort, safety, and well-being of their animal.

Students

This document assumes that the school professionals have screened students to be appropriate to participate in animal-assisted therapy. This includes screening students for past animal experiences (both positive and negative), allergies, fears, and aversions. All students are assumed to have signed permission forms from a parent or guardian.

Human-Animal Bond in Colorado (HABIC)

Human-Animal Bond in Colorado, part of the Colorado State University's School of Social Work, sponsors community engagement programs, education, and research to explore and advance the benefits of the human-animal bond.

HABIC Mission

Improving the quality of life for people of all ages through the therapeutic benefits of companion animals.

Animal-Assisted Therapy

Animal-assisted therapy (AAT) is a goal-directed intervention in which an animal meeting specific criteria is an integral part of the treatment process. AAT is delivered and/or directed by health or human service providers working within the scope of their profession.

AAT is designed to promote improvement in human physical, social, emotional, or cognitive function. AAT is provided in a variety of settings and may be group or individual in nature. The process is documented and evaluated.

Human-animal teams work closely with specialized health and human services professionals. Because of its ongoing role in a client's treatment regimen and the need for documentation and evaluation, AAT requires additional training of human-animal teams.

AAT stands in contrast to other animal-assisted activities (AAA) that may take place in schools or in the community. Because of the goal-directed nature of AAT, the HABIC team will be primarily working with one student at a time, always under the direction of a school professional.

HABIC and other community organizations offer the ability to request human-animal teams to meet with groups of students for non-therapeutic purposes. Schools should contact HABIC or other organizations to request and schedule these events, as they are distinct and separate from the AAT discussed throughout this document.

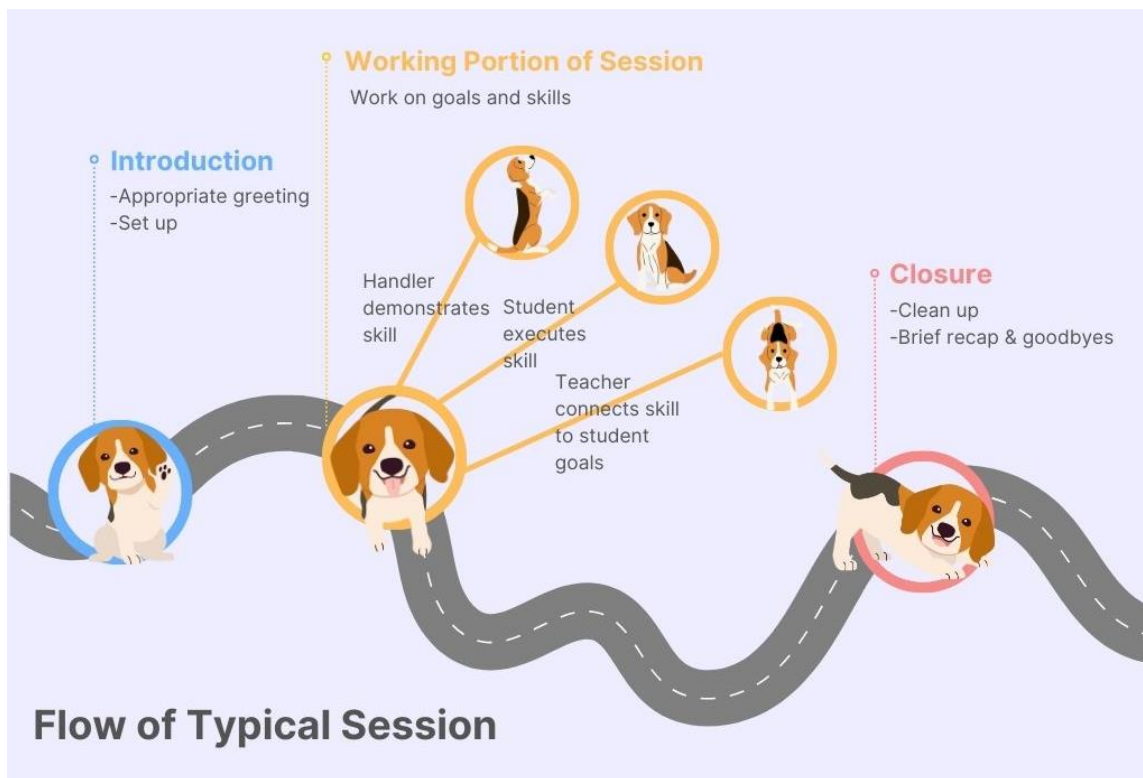


Animal-Assisted Therapy Curriculum for Schools

Animal-assisted therapies (AAT) have many benefits. The presence of an animal can increase a participant's motivation to attend the session and work toward their goals. Animals can act as a mirror, reflecting our own emotions. If a person is anxious, the animal might appear anxious, choose to leave the session, or not be compliant with cues. Animals also offer their nonjudgmental attention and affection.

AAT sessions are conducted with a school professional, a HABIC dog, a HABIC handler, and the student. The school professional is the advocate for the student, sets their goals, and leads each session. The HABIC handler is usually the owner of the HABIC dog. The handler is the advocate for the dog and can help teach some of the skills that the dog knows.

AAT sessions usually last 20-30 minutes. Below is the flow of a typical session.



Flow of the Therapeutic Relationship

Introductions

During this stage of the therapeutic relationship, the student and the HABIC team are introduced to one another.

- The HABIC handler will introduce the student to their dog and supply background information about the dog, including sex, age, breed and any other relevant information that the student might find interesting or that the handler believes is relevant.
- The school professional should orient the HABIC team and the students to the purpose of the relationship with the HABIC team.
- The student should be encouraged to share their experiences with dogs so that the HABIC team and school professional can determine the student's level of comfort with dogs and dog handling.
- The student and the school professional are encouraged to share goals for animal-assisted therapy with the HABIC handler.
- The HABIC handler is encouraged to share special skills that their dog has and their relevance to addressing the student's goals.

Building Rapport

Rapport building is essential to the strength of the therapeutic relationship, including building rapport between the student and the HABIC team.

- The HABIC handler should be accepting of the student, meeting them with empathy, interest, warmth, and respect.
- The HABIC handler and the school professional should intentionally allow the student to self-determine, providing space for the student to decide how they want to engage with the HABIC team with positive encouragement to practice new skills and activities.
- The school professional and the HABIC handler should provide opportunities for the student to give feedback about the things that they feel are going well and identify areas for growth.
- The school professional and the HABIC handler are encouraged to evaluate the effectiveness of interventions that are utilized in sessions periodically to identify areas of success and opportunities for growth.
- Students may benefit from learning animal handling skills, such as basic cues that the HABIC handler uses to motivate their dogs to complete behaviors. These foundational skills can be found in the "Basic Skills" section below.
- Both the student and dog gain trust in one another. Initially, some students may be hesitant, or even fearful, when working with the dog. These students should be supported in building confidence through encouragement and gradual increases to their direct contact with the dog. Other students may be very enthusiastic and should be supported to practice emotional regulation, keeping their body and voice calm.

Intervention

- The school professional is responsible for conducting the session. As such, the school professional should be present for the entirety of the session. If the school professional cannot

be present, another school professional must be present. If no professional can be present, the session must be rescheduled.

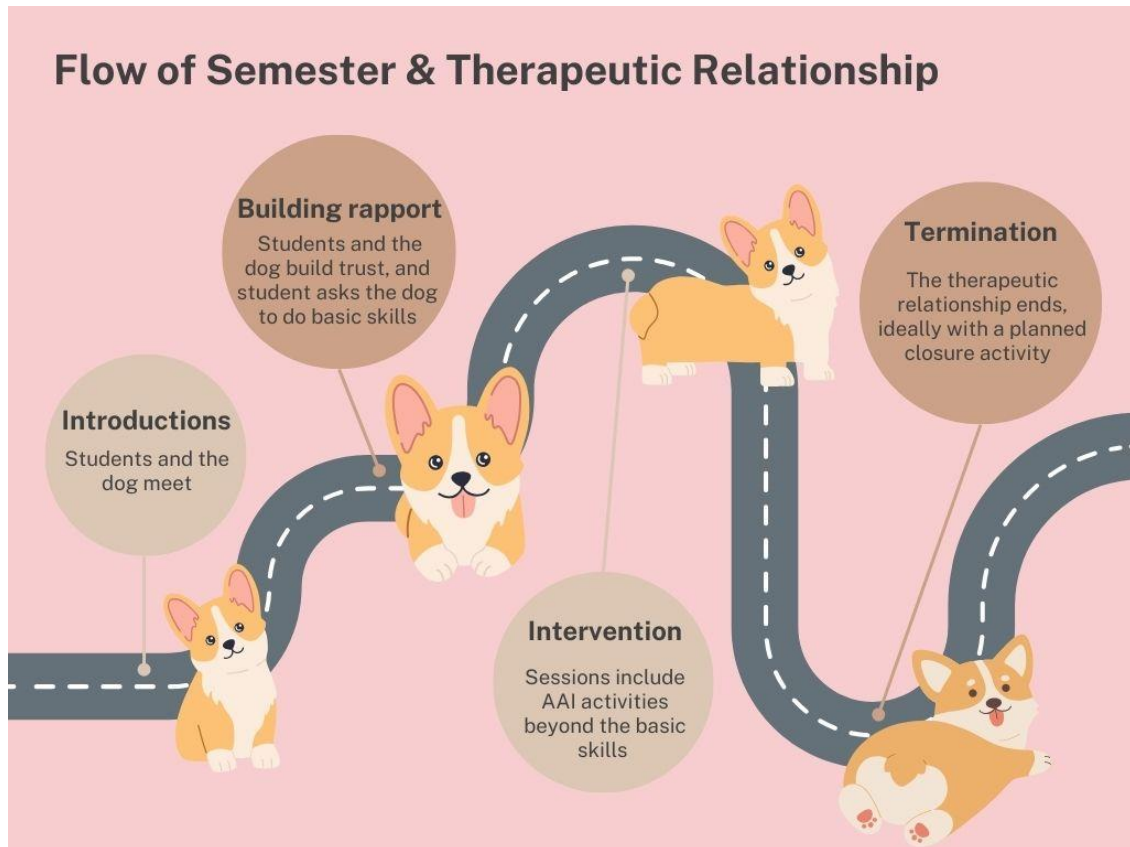
- The intervention should be goal-directed with the intent of addressing skills that the school professional and student wish to learn, improve, and practice.
- Interventions utilized during the animal-assisted therapy session should be thoroughly explained to the student.
- The student should be provided with an opportunity to ask questions and provide their consent for participation in the activity.
- Interventions may vary in intensity depending on the mood and energy level of the student, their individual therapeutic needs, and their comfort level in working with dogs.

Terminating the Relationship

The animal-assisted therapeutic relationship may be quite brief or last for multiple years. Termination of the relationship can also take a variety of forms.

- **Soft Termination:** The relationship with the HABIC team may need to be paused with the intent to start sessions again after a break. Breaks may need to be taken due to school holidays, medical events for any member of the triad (student, school professional, HABIC team), or other reason.
 - When possible, the student should be informed in advance that there will be a pause in sessions. The HABIC handler can provide the student with a picture of the dog so that the student has a pleasant reminder of the team.
- **Expected Termination:** The relationship with the HABIC team may come to a firm end for a variety of reasons, including that the student has met their goals, the HABIC team retires, animal-assisted therapy is not providing the desired benefit, or other reason.
 - When possible, the student should be informed in advance that sessions will be ending. The HABIC handler can provide the student with a picture of the dog so that the student has a pleasant reminder of the team.
 - The school professional and the HABIC handler are strongly encouraged to organize a termination session to avoid feelings of abandonment for the student.
 - Termination sessions may include the creation or exchange of a memento that the student can keep, like a small photo flipbook.
 - During the termination session, all participants are encouraged to share their favorite memories of the session.
- **Termination Without Closure:** Unfortunately, the therapeutic relationship may end abruptly, and it may not be possible for the student, school professional, or HABIC team to receive a sense of closure. This can be an emotional experience for everyone involved.
- **Emotional Response to Closure:** Closure can create complicated feelings ranging from joy and grief to everything in between; the entire spectrum of which is normal.
 - The student may experience grief over their loss of relationship with the HABIC team, this may be especially true for their relationship with the HABIC dog. Because students may miss this relationship, it is especially important for students to be given the opportunity to seek closure via a termination session. Students may benefit from additional support from the school professional following termination, as applicable.

- The HABIC handler may likewise experience feelings of sadness and grief upon termination of the therapeutic relationship. HABIC handlers are encouraged to reach out to the HABIC office staff for support following termination, as needed.



Therapeutic Value Present Throughout the Curriculum

The following pages detail activities that can be completed in an animal-assisted therapy setting. Each activity has a list of therapeutic values specific to that activity. Below is a list of therapeutic values that may be applied to all the activities in this curriculum.

- Interpersonal Skill Development and Growth
 - Join a game or activity when invited by another.
 - Use a voice tone and volume appropriate to the task and setting.
 - Collaborate with others to solve a problem or complete a task.
 - Listen to and comprehend instructions.
- Support and Develop Self-Awareness and Self-Confidence
 - Make positive statements about the qualities and accomplishments of self.
 - Make positive statements about the qualities and accomplishments of others.
 - Attempt tasks that may be considered challenging.
- Executive Function: Attention
 - Sustained—maintain focus on a specific task to completion, ignoring irrelevant distractions.
- Emotional regulation
 - Express emotions appropriately by using words to state feelings.
 - Receive feedback.
 - Identify signs of frustration in self.
 - Name/demonstrate alternative, appropriate ways to express emotions.
 - Continue to maintain appropriate behavior even when frustrated.
 - Respond to success/failure appropriately.
 - Utilize coping/emotional regulation mechanisms.

Therapeutic Activities

Basic Skills

Intervention-Specific Therapeutic Value

Foundational skills can be used in a wide variety of contexts for several purposes. They may provide any of the above therapeutic benefits depending on intervention context.

Supplies Needed

- No additional supplies

Description

The student will learn to cue the dog to complete basic tasks. All HABIC dogs complete a final evaluation where they are able to demonstrate each of these tasks. However, it may still take time to transfer the cue from the handler to the student. Below are the skills and descriptions of the basic skills:

- Treat Delivery: Dog waits for a treat in a flat hand, until released to eat the treat.
- Walking at Heel: Dog remains at student's side through duration of the exercise. Dog sits next to student when student stops walking. NOTE: Double leashing should be used during this exercise, where the handler has one leash, and the student has the other.
- Sit: Dog sits when cued.
- Down: Dog lays down when cued.
- Stand: Dog stands on all fours when cued.
- Recall & Finish: Dog remains in a wait as student moves away from dog. Dog returns to student when called and sits in front of student. Dog finishes to heel position with a left OR right finish.
- Stay: Dog remains in position (sit or down) for up to 1 minute while the student is up to 20 feet away.

Modifications

- The dog's handler may have modifications to any of these exercises. Cues for each skill will be different depending on the dog and how they were trained. The handler will be able to share more details.

Precautions

It can be frustrating for a student if the dog doesn't comply with their cues right away. Be ready to offer additional support and help teach the student how to "re-train" the dog to do the behavior.

Dog Perspective

It can be challenging for a dog to learn to take cues from a new person. Be patient with the dog and remember that they may need to be "re-trained" when the student is the one giving the cues.

Required Dog Skills

All the skills listed above.

Baseball

Intervention Specific Therapeutic Value

Interpersonal Skill Development and Growth

- Wait for turn when playing a game.
- Positively handle defeat in competitive game situations.

Executive Functioning: Attention

- Flexibility—adaptation to changes in the environment.

Supplies Needed

- List of activities that the dog can perform, written on slips of paper.
 - Rate each skill as easy, medium, or difficult. For easy, put one star next to the skill. For medium skills, put two or three stars next to the skill. For difficult skills, put four stars next to the skill.
- A Container or hat to hold the slips of paper.
- Bases. Full sheets of paper or carpet squares can be used.

Description

A baseball diamond is set up using the space that is available. The dog is the pitcher and remains in the middle of the diamond. The dog and the handler hold a container or hat. In the container or hat are slips of paper with rated skills that the dog knows on them. The student and practitioner take turns coming up to bat. The person at bat draws a slip of paper and attempts to complete the skills with the dog. If they are successful, they can move around the bases using corresponding number of stars from the skill. The student and practitioner take turns until either one has the preset number of points or until the container or hat is empty.

Modifications

If a less competitive game is more appropriate, it can be modified to be a cooperative game where the student is trying to get three in a row without a competitor.

Precautions

This game can be quite competitive if appropriate. If a less competitive game is more appropriate, it can be modified to be a cooperative game where the student is trying to get three in a row without a competitor.

Dog Perspective

The dog will be handled by two different people. Make sure the dog is comfortable taking cues from different people. Also make sure the dog gets a break between games.

Required Dog Skills

- Wait or stay while people move around the dog.
- A handful of skills that the dog can perform by taking cues from different people.

While many interventions presented in this curriculum have videos demonstrating training tips for the intervention, you will find that some do not. This is an evolving document and videos, as well as additional interventions, will be added as they are developed.

Blindfolded Maze

Intervention Specific Therapeutic Value

Interpersonal Skill Development and Growth

- Communicate directions effectively and compassionately.
- Develop and strengthen empathetic response (consider the challenge of navigating an obstacle course while blindfolded and have empathy for that challenge).

Supplies Needed

- Painter's tape to mark the obstacle course on the floor.
- Blindfold.

Description

Tape is used to mark an obstacle course on the floor, then the dog handler is blindfolded. The student stands nearby and verbally directs the handler and dog to navigate the maze. The handler and the student can switch roles.

Modifications

- The blindfolded person can be blindfolded before the obstacle course is marked.
- The blindfolded person can be directed through the maze and then instructed to call the dog through the maze.
- The dog can be blindfolded and led through the maze by following the scent of treats.

Precautions

- Be extremely cautious of tripping and slipping hazards. Create a maze with tape on the floor to avoid tripping, slipping, or running into obstacles while blindfolded.

Dog Perspective

The dog may need many extra treats from the handler to stay with the handler while going through the obstacle course. People will be moving in a much more timid manner than the dog is likely used to. The handler should remember to cue the dog when they are moving forward to avoid accidentally dragging the dog.

Required Dog Skills

Excellent heeling skills. The dog should remain close to the handler with little encouragement, even when the handler is moving slowly or turning.

While many interventions presented in this curriculum have videos demonstrating training tips for the intervention, you will find that some do not. This is an evolving document and videos, as well as additional interventions, will be added as they are developed.

Colors

Intervention Specific Therapeutic Value

Interpersonal Skill Development and Growth

- Develop and strengthen empathetic response (in the event that the dog makes a mistake in color recognition, and to encourage the student to consider why certain colors are used).
- Communicate directions effectively and compassionately.

Supplies Needed

- A bright blue object.
- A Bright yellow object.
- Ideally, the objects are identical except for the color (i.e., a blue plate and a yellow plate, a blue sheet of paper and a yellow sheet of paper, a blue block and a yellow block, etc.).

Description

The student holds the blue object and the yellow object out in front of themselves. The student then says “blue, touch” or “yellow, touch.” The dog then touches the correct color. If the dog touches the incorrect color, the student tries again. If the dog still touches the incorrect color, the student can make the correct answer more obvious to the dog.

Modifications

- The objects can be placed on the floor for the dog to choose from.
- One person can hold one object and another person can hold the other object.

Precautions

Be sure that the dog does not touch the objects too enthusiastically, especially if the student is holding the objects.

- Some Students may experience hesitance when working with dogs.
- When the dog is able to remain calm and regulated, it allows the student to begin to build feelings of confidence and safety in their interactions with the therapy animal team. People and animals can influence each other's emotional and behavioral regulation. By encouraging the dog to engage calmly, the student may be better able to maintain their own emotional and behavioral regulation more easily.

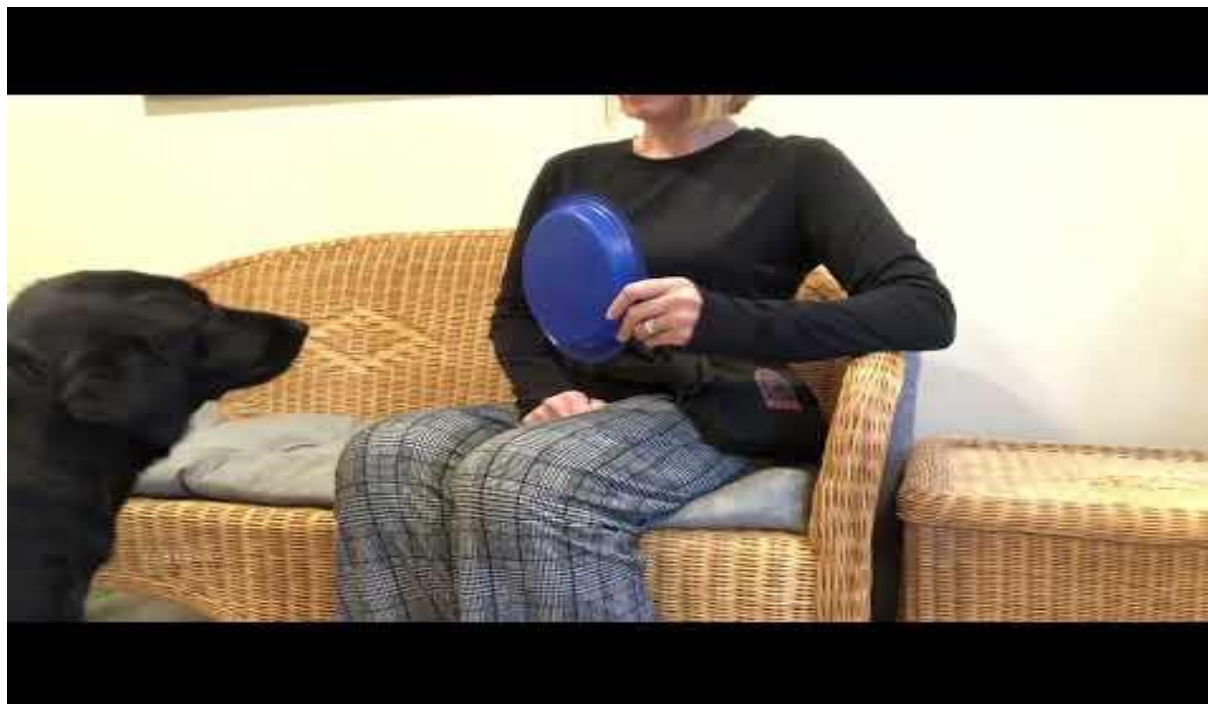
Dog Perspective

Dogs see blue and yellow most clearly, which is why these colors are recommended. Avoid using other colors that may appear as brown or gray to the dog.

Required Dog Skills

- Target an object.
- Know the colors “blue” and “yellow.”

[Colors](#)



Cups

Intervention-Specific Therapeutic Value

Interpersonal Skills Development and Growth

- Flexibility—adapt to changes in environment.

Fine and Gross Motor Skills

- Practice fine motor control by placing a small treat under one of the cups.
- Practice gross motor skills by utilizing coordinated, large-body movements to move the cups.
- Hand-eye coordination.

Visual-Spatial Perception

Supplies Needed

- Treats
- Three plastic cups

Description

- The student will place a treat beneath one of the cups. While the dog waits in a stay, use one hand to shuffle the upside-down cups. The student can give their guess to which cup the treat is under. Release the dog to find the hidden treat. Thoroughly praise the dog when the dog correctly locates the treat.

Modifications

- The student, handler, or school professional can move the cups, depending on the comfort of the student.
- The student can predict which cup the dog will go to first, verbalizing treat location with “right,” “left,” or “center.”
- The student can provide verbal or nonverbal cues to guide the dog to choose the correct cup.

Precautions

- The handler will watch the dog closely to avoid the possibility of accidental nipping when the dog retrieves the treat.

Dog Perspective

The surface that the cups are stacked on and the weight of cups can create challenges for the dog. It may be necessary to weigh down the cups by stacking two cups with a weight between them and taping the cups together. The handler will be responsible for determining the cup modifications.

Required Dog Skills

- Stay with duration.
- Ability to locate treats by scent.
- Interest in locating treats beneath objects.
- Absolutely no resource guarding.

Watch the video below for more information on training this skill.

[Cups](#)



Funfetti Pup-Cakes

Intervention-Specific Therapeutic Value

Interpersonal Skill Development and Growth

- Develop and strengthen empathetic response (consider the challenge of the dog being still and have empathy for that challenge).

Fine Motor Control

- Hand eye coordination.

Supplies Needed

- Hole punch (regular or shapes) or scissors.
- Colored paper.

Description

- Using a whole punch or scissors, the student cuts out confetti in a variety of colors. The dog lays down on their side. The student “decorates” the “pup-cake” by placing the paper cutouts on the dog. The student then gently removes the confetti from the dog with their fingers.

Modifications

- Confetti may be pre-cut and ready to use for the intervention, removing the need to cut out confetti pieces.
- Different sizes and shapes of confetti can be used by cutting paper pieces of various sizes or using items such as pom-poms or small, plastic toys.

Precautions

- Use pre-cut confetti, pom-poms, or small, plastic toys if safety is a concern when using hole punch tools or scissors.
- Be careful that the dog’s fur is not pulled, especially when confetti is removed.

Dog Perspective

Make sure that the dog is comfortable when laying in the same position for the duration of the activity. a bed or mat, provided by the animal handler, can be used to make the floor more comfortable. Ensure that the dog is in a calm state before beginning this activity. This activity may be best integrated toward the end of the session when the dog is more tired. Remember to praise the dog for maintaining a stay for a long duration.

Required Dog Skills

- Lay down on their side.
- Stay with long duration; including when confetti are applied on the dog and removed.
- Watch the video below for more information on training this skill.

[Funfetti Pup-Cakes](#)



Hide & Seek

Intervention-Specific Therapeutic Value

Interpersonal Skill Development and Growth

- Develop and strengthen empathetic response (consider the challenge of finding a hidden treat for the dog and have empathy for that challenge).

Fine and Gross Motor Control

- Improve fine motor control by placing small treats.
- Hand-eye coordination.

Supplies Needed

- Dog treats with a strong scent.

Description

While the dog is “distracted” (elsewhere, being pet by another party, etc.), the student hides the treats or toy. Once they have been hidden, the dog is cued to find the treats or toy. If the dog has difficulty locating the treats, the student can provide nonverbal and/or verbal “hints” to the dog. The dog and the student continue the activity until all the treats are located.

Modifications

- The student can be asked to hide the treats or toys in specific locations in the classroom, verbally identifying the location.
- If the dog is unable to locate the treat or toy, the student can be asked to verbalize why the hiding spot might have been too challenging for the dog to find, problem solving ways to make the task easier for the dog.
- The student can be encouraged to practice social skills by placing the treat or toy with another student (if more than one student is present) or with the school professional.

Precautions

- Take care to hide the treats and/or toys in places that are safe for the dog.
- To maintain safety, do not place the treats or toys in areas where the dog would need to climb or jump over or around furniture or people.

Dog Perspective

If the dog is struggling with locating the hidden item(s), place them in an easily accessible location, such as in an obvious place on the floor. The treat can be exposed, partially exposed, or completely hidden depending on the dog’s proficiency with the skill.

Required Dog Skills

The dog must have the ability to find treats by scent. Watch the video below for more tips on training this skill.

[Hide & Seek](#)



Hide & Seek: Advanced

Intervention-Specific Therapeutic Value

Interpersonal Skill Development and Growth

- Read and comprehend written instructions.
- Develop and strengthen empathetic response. Ex: Consider the challenge of finding a hidden ball for the dog.

Fine and Gross Motor Control

- Improve fine motor control by placing small treats.
- Hand-eye coordination.

Reading Skills Practice

- Reading decoding, comprehension, and fluency.
- Building confidence in reading aloud.

Supplies Needed

- Dog treats with a strong scent.
- Dog-safe balls with holes.
- Paper and a writing utensil.

Description

- The school professional writes one activity on each piece of paper, folds it, and places it inside each ball along with a smelly treat. Then, when the dog is “distracted” (elsewhere, being pet by another party, etc.), the student hides the balls. Once they have been hidden, the dog is cued to find the scented ball. When the dog finds one, the student removes the treat and the written activity from the ball. The dog is given the treat, and the student completes the activity prompt. If the dog has difficulty locating the ball, the student can provide nonverbal and/or verbal “hints” to the dog. The dog and the student continue the activity until all balls are located.

Modifications

- If the dog is motivated by the ball in absence of treats, the dog can be cued to find the ball without treats.
- Two participants can send messages or activity choices back and forth by ball, with the dog acting as messenger and the challenges hidden inside the ball.
- Instead of hiding the ball, the school professional or student can toss the ball and the dog can deliver the ball with the task.

Precautions

Take care to hide the balls/treats in places that are safe for the dog.

Dog Perspective

The dog should be trained in advance to locate the ball by scent. Make sure that the airflow in the area or room is conducive to the dog’s success. Don’t make it too difficult. Be sure to ensure that the balls are

hidden in a safe place for the dog to seek. Do not allow the dog to keep and chew on the ball after retrieving as ingesting the materials can have negative health consequences for the dog.

Required Dog Skills

The dog must have the ability to find balls/treats by scent.

While many interventions presented in this curriculum have videos demonstrating training tips for the intervention, you will find that some do not. This is an evolving document and videos, as well as additional interventions, will be added as they are developed.

Jump

Intervention Specific Therapeutic Value

Interpersonal Skill Development and Growth

- Develop and strengthen empathetic response (consider the challenge jumping over an obstacle for the dog and have empathy for that challenge).

Executive Function: Attention

- Sustained—maintain focus on a specific task to completion, ignoring irrelevant distractions.
- Flexibility—adapt to changes in environment.

Visual-Spatial Awareness

Supplies Needed

- Treats
- A structure provided by the handler for the dog to jump over, this item can take numerous forms:
 - Agility PVC jump.
 - Pool noodle.
 - Broom handle
 - Hula hoop

Description

Cue the dog to wait in a stay while the student, school professional, and handler determine the setup of the jump. Cue the dog to jump over or through the obstacle. During the activity, the student can decide the height or location of the jump, even if the jump does not seem feasible (provided the height and location conform to safety precautions below).

Modifications

- The student can choose where jump goes, who holds noodle/jump, how high to place jump.
- The student can help determine if the dog has enough traction to do the jump.
- The student can help determine if the dog has enough room to jump.
- The student can watch someone else set the jump and identify the spatial relationship (Ex: high/low jump, left/right, front/behind).

Precautions

- When the dog is jumping, ensure that the dog has good footing and won't slide when they land.
- Ensure that the dog has adequate space to jump over the obstacle and land.
- If the student is nervous around dogs, allow the handler to demonstrate the skill with the dog to avoid startling the student.
- The handler should help the student hold and move the jump, if applicable.

Dog Perspective

Dog should have enough space to do the jumps and opportunities for breaks a. Ensure that the dog has access to water and a cool place to rest. Give praise and treats when the dog completes each jump.

Required Dog Skills

- Jumping over an obstacle.
- Stay with duration.

[Jump](#)



Kid's Puzzles

Intervention Specific Therapeutic Value

Interpersonal Skill Development and Growth

- Read and comprehend written instructions.

Reading Skills Practice

- Reading de-coding, comprehension, and fluency.

Fine and Gross Motor Control

- Hand-eye coordination.
- Improve fine motor control by placing small treats and tennis balls.

Supplies Needed

- Kid's wooden or plastic puzzle.

Description

Write the names of skills that the dog knows on the back of each puzzle piece. There will be one skill on the back of each puzzle piece. To begin, the pieces of the puzzle will be removed. The student will select a puzzle piece and cue the dog to do the skill. If the student and dog successfully complete the skill, the student can add the puzzle piece into the puzzle. Then, the student moves on to the next puzzle piece.

Modifications

- This activity can be made easier by having some of the puzzle pieces already in place in the puzzle.
- This activity can also be made easier by having the school professional place the puzzle pieces into the puzzle once the student and dog complete the skill.
- This activity can be made more challenging by hiding the puzzle pieces around the room. The student has to find the puzzle pieces before completing the skill that is written on them.

Precautions

- Watch the dog closely to ensure that the dog does not chew and/or consume any of the puzzle pieces.
- If hiding the puzzle pieces, take care to hide them in places that are safe for the student.

Dog Perspective

This activity can involve the student and dog completing many skills in rapid succession. Watch the dog closely for signs of fatigue and give the dog breaks if needed.

Required Dog Skills

- Wait/stay or relax on a mat while the student selects puzzle pieces and places the pieces in the puzzle
- Ability to complete all the skills that are written on the puzzle pieces.

Watch the video below for more information on training this skill.

[Kid's Puzzle](#)



Muffin Tin

Intervention Specific Therapeutic Value

Interpersonal Skill Development and Growth

- Develop and strengthen empathetic response (consider the challenge of finding a hidden treat for the dog and have empathy for that challenge).

Fine and Gross Motor Control

- Hand-eye coordination.
- Improve fine motor control by placing small treats and tennis balls.

Supplies Needed

- Treats.
- A muffin tin.
- Tennis balls.

Description

The student will place multiple treats in the muffin tin with tennis balls then placed on top to cover the treats. The muffin tin cups will be covered by tennis balls, though some can be left uncovered). The dog will be cued to wait while the muffin tin is placed on the ground. Once the dog is released, they will search for the treat(s) until they find them.

Modifications

- The student can choose how many treats/balls are in the tin, as well as where to place them.
- The student can watch someone else place the treats and identify the location (center, corner, left, right) and amount.
- The student can help determine why the dog ate the uncovered treats before the covered treats.
- The tennis balls can be numbered or otherwise labeled and related to a prompt. The student completes the prompt related to the label on the first tennis ball that the dog removes from the tin.

Precautions

- Be mindful of the location of the tennis balls when the dog removes them from the muffin tin as they can pose a tripping hazard.

Dog Perspective

If the dog pushes the muffin tin across the floor, the handler, school professional, or student can hold the muffin tin still for them.

Required Dog Skills

- Stay with duration.
- Ability to find treats by scent.

- Interest in finding treats in a muffin tin.
- Absolutely no resource guarding.

Watch the video below for more information on training this skill.

[Muffin Tin](#)



Over and Under

Intervention-Specific Therapeutic Value

Executive Functioning: Attention

- Flexibility—adapt to changes in environment.

Gross Motor Skills

- Improve gross motor skills by practicing coordinated, large-body movements.

Visual-Spatial Perception

Supplies Needed

- Pool noodle (or other objects to move around).
- Mat for dog to wait on (optional).

Description

- The student practices spatial concepts by cueing the dog to go over or under an object.

Modifications

- The student can practice other directions by cueing the dog to finish right or finish left. The student can also move around the dog while the dog remains in a stay. The student can go near or far from the dog, can go clockwise or counterclockwise around the dog, or can even step over the dog.
- The student can watch someone else move in relation to the dog and identify the spatial relationship between them.
- The student can place index cards with words like “far,” “near,” “left,” “right,” “behind,” and “in front” around the dog that indicate the card’s position in relation to the dog.

Precautions

- If the dog is jumping, ensure that the dog has good footing and won’t slide when they land.
- If the dog is going under something, ensure that the dog won’t get stuck.
- If the student is stepping over the dog, ensure that the dog has a very good stay and won’t stand up while the student is stepping over them.

Dog Perspective

If the dog is expected to remain in a stay, remember to frequently go back to the dog and reward them for maintaining the stay. Watch the dog closely for signs of fatigue when doing repetitions of any task. Skills such as over and under can be quite physically demanding for the dog.

Required Dog Skills

Ability to go over and under and object. Watch the video below for tips on training this skill.

[Over & Under](#)



Retrieve

Intervention Specific Therapeutic Value

Interpersonal Skill Development and Growth

- Develop and strengthen empathetic response (consider the challenge of finding a hidden treat for the dog and have empathy for that challenge).

Fine and Gross Motor Control

- Hand-eye coordination.
- Improve gross motor control skills by practicing coordinated, large-body movements.

Visual-Spatial Perception

Supplies Needed

- Treats.
- Dog toy(s), such as tennis balls or other soft and throwable toys.

Description

The dog will be cued to wait while the student tosses the toy within the area. When cued, the dog will retrieve the toy and bring it back to the student. The student can decide the direction and location of the toy and type of toss.

Modifications

- The student can be requested to throw the toy in a specific direction (left/right), distance (near/far), or height (high, low).
- The student can be asked to verbalize the spatial relationship of the dog to the toy.
- The student can throw multiple toys and guess which toy the dog will choose, adapting the throw to encourage the dog to pick a specific toy.

Precautions

- If the activity takes place outdoors or in a novel environment, the handler should be sure to carefully monitor the dog and the environment to maintain safety.
- If the dog is over-excited to retrieve the toy, the handler should work with the dog to keep the dog calm and regulated.
- Do not forcefully remove the toy from the dog's mouth. Allow the dog to release it into someone's hand or onto the ground.

Dog Perspective

The dog should be given opportunities to take breaks after retrieving multiple times. The dog must have continuous access to water and a cool, comfortable place to rest. Be sure to praise and reward the dog for retrieving.

Required Dog Skills

- Stay with duration and distance.

- Retrieve.
- Absolutely no resource guarding.

Watch the video below for more information on training this skill.

[Retrieve](#)



Roll the Dice

Intervention Specific Therapeutic Value

Support and Develop Self-Awareness and Self-Confidence

- Attempt tasks that may be considered challenging (this may relate to the task being addressed, or the number of repetitions as determined by the dice).

Foundations of Math Skills

- Number sense, specifically, recognize that symbols (dots on the dice) represent quantities.
- Ability to count verbally in sequence.
- Spatial awareness (visualize how many dots are on the dice).

Supplies Needed

- Large, dog-safe dice.

Description

During an activity such as therapeutic exercises, the student tosses a die a short distance away. The student then cues the dog to retrieve the die and drop the die in front of the student. The number on the die determines the number of repetitions or duration of time (seconds, minutes) that the student will perform a planned activity. This intervention allows the dog to determine how many repetitions, or how long the student will perform, rather than the school professional.

Modifications

The dog can roll the dice to determine how many repetitions of a task they will complete. The specific task will depend on the dog. Some examples include roll overs, puppy push-ups, retrieve, jumps, going through tunnels, or stays for the length of time represented by the die.

Precautions

- Do not do this activity if there is any chance that the student will become frustrated at getting a high number on the die and is at risk of un/intentionally acting out their feelings of frustration on the dog, which may be perceived by the dog as threatening.
- Ensure that the dice are soft and will not harm the dog's teeth.
- Ensure that the dice are large enough to avoid posing a choking hazard.

Dog Perspective

Watch the dog closely for fatigue when doing repetitions of any task. Skills such as retrieve, jump, or puppy push-ups can be quite physically demanding for the dog.

Required Dog Skills

Ability to retrieve and drop a die and interest in doing so. Watch the video below for more information on training this skill.

[Roll the Dice](#)



Tic-Tac-Toe

Intervention Specific Therapeutic Value

Interpersonal Skill Development and Growth

- Wait for turn when playing a game.
- Positively handle defeat in competitive game situations.

Fine and Gross Motor Control

Supplies Needed

- A 2'x2' tic-tac-toe board on the floor. This can be created with painter's tape, yard sticks, or other materials.
- Objects that can be used to represent X's and O's.
 - Different colored cones or different colored sticky notes.
 - Paper plates with X or O marked on them.

Description

The student is X's, and the practitioner or handler is O's. In order to place an X or an O on the tic-tac-toe board, the dog must complete a task. For example, the dog must lay down when cued. If the dog succeeds in the task, the person gets to place their X or O. Three X's or O's in a row wins the game.

Modifications

- Tap lights can be used by placing 9 tap lights on the board, one in each square. The goal is for the dog to touch the tap light in the desired square within 30 seconds. If the dog successfully turns on the light, the person puts a colored cone or colored sticky note on the light. The person working with the dog can do anything they would like to get the dog to turn on the light (i.e., they can lure the dog with a treat, they can ask the dog to sit on the light, they can put a treat on the light, the dog can wag their tail to turn the light on, the dog can step on the light, etc.). The person CANNOT push on the dog or pull on their leash.
- The "leave it" cue can be used. The board starts with no X's or O's. The person approaches the board with the dog and cues the dog to "leave it." The person attempts to place the cone or sticky note on the board in the desired square. If the dog touches the item, or moves forward to touch/sniff the item, the person does not place their X or O and it becomes the next person's turn.
- The student completes the task with the dog. Their competitor completes tasks with a challenge (i.e., the person balances a cone on their head or balances a ball on a spoon while completing each task).

Precautions

This game can be quite competitive if appropriate. If a less competitive game is more appropriate, it can be modified to be a cooperative game where the student is trying to get three in a row without a competitor.

Dog Perspective

The dog will be handled by two different people. Make sure the dog is comfortable taking cues from different people. Also make sure the dog gets a break between games.

Required Dog Skills

- Simple behaviors that can be cued by different people.
- Leave-it if the leave-it modification is used.

While many interventions presented in this curriculum have videos demonstrating training tips for the intervention, you will find that some do not. This is an evolving document and videos, as well as additional interventions, will be added as they are developed.

Treats on Paws

Intervention Specific Therapeutic Value

Interpersonal Skill Development and Growth

- Develop and strengthen empathetic response (consider the challenge of waiting to eat the treats for the dog and have empathy for that challenge).

Fine and Gross Motor Control

- Improve fine motor control by placing small treats.
- Hand-eye coordination.

Supplies Needed

- Treats and a treat pouch.

Description

The dog will be cued to wait in either a sit or down position. The student or handler will then place a treat on the dog's paw. The dog will then be released from the wait and allowed to eat the treats.

Modifications

- Treats may be placed on the dog's paw(s) in a number of ways.
 - One treat on one paw.
 - One treat on both paws.
 - Multiple treats on both paws (make a line of treats going up the dog's leg).
 - One treat on both paws with treats placed between their paws as well.
- The student or the handler can place the treats on the paws of the dog.

Precautions

The handler will watch the dog closely to avoid the possibility of accidental nipping when the dog retrieves the treat.

Dog Perspective

Be patient and gentle with the dog. It can be tempting to push/shove the dog's nose away if the dog tries to eat the treat before being released. But it can be very confusing for the dog. Imagine your coworker approaches you with a box of donuts. They lift the lid and hold them out to you. You start reaching for your favorite chocolate glazed donut with sprinkles, and then they smack your hand away. This can be how it feels for the dog. If you need to stop them from eating the treat, gently remind them to "wait" and gently cover the treat with your hand.

Required Dog Skills

- Stay with duration.
- Wait with duration.
- Absolutely no resource guarding.

Watch the video below for more information on training this skill.

[Treats on paws](#)



Tunnel

Intervention Specific Therapeutic Value

Visual-Spatial Perception

Supplies Needed

- Treats.
- Tunnel (several options).
 - Dog agility tunnel.
 - A collapsible laundry hamper with the bottom cut out.
 - Collapsible lawn debris bags with the bottoms cut out.
 - Two hula hoops with sheet connecting them.
 - Kids tunnel (for small dogs).

Description

While the dog waits in a stay, the student, school professional, and handler can collaborate to determine the appropriate setup location for the tunnel. The dog will go through the tunnel when cued. Praise dog for going through the tunnel and treat thoroughly.

Modifications

- The student can help identify ways to keep the tunnel from rolling. They can also choose objects to hold the tunnel in place.
- The student can choose where to place the tunnel in the room.
- The student can help identify if the dog has enough room to get in and out of the tunnel.

Precautions

- The handler and school professional must supervise the intervention and prevent the tunnel from moving or rolling, which may cause an accidental injury to human or animal participants.

Dog Perspective

While the dog is expected to remain in a stay, remember to frequently go back to the dog and reward them for maintaining the stay. Watch the dog closely for signs of fatigue when doing repetitions of any task. Skills such as running through an agility tunnel can be quite physically demanding for the dog.

Required Dog Skills

- Running through a tunnel.
- Stay with duration.

Watch the video below for more information on training this skill.

[Tunnel](#)



Turn the Page

Intervention Specific Therapeutic Value

Reading Skills Practice

- Reading decoding, comprehension, and fluency.
- Building confidence in reading aloud.

Supplies Needed

- Book appropriate to the student's reading level.
 - Use a cardboard book if that is easier for the dog to turn the pages.
- Optional: a dog related book.

Description

The student reads a book aloud to the dog. The dog assists by turning the page when cued.

Modifications

The practitioner or dog handler can read the book to the student.

Precautions

Use books that will not cause distress if they are slobbered on or ripped.

Dog Perspective

The dog may need to relax on a mat or be able to be in a stay while the student is reading. This is especially true if the dog is very eager to turn the pages of the book.

Required Dog Skills

- Turn the page of a book.
- Down wait/stay with duration while the student is reading. The dog will remain in a down for a long period of time, long enough for a student to read to them.

While many interventions presented in this curriculum have videos demonstrating training tips for the intervention, you will find that some do not. This is an evolving document and videos, as well as additional interventions, will be added as they are developed.

What's in the bag?

Intervention Specific Therapeutic Value

Interpersonal Skill Development and Growth

- Read and comprehend written instructions.

Reading Skills Practice

- Reading de-coding, comprehension, and fluency.
- Building confidence in reading aloud.

Supplies Needed

- Paper lunch bags.
- Slips of paper with activities written on them to place in bags.
- Mat for dog to wait upon (optional, provided by the animal handler).

Description

Place a different goal-directed activity in each lunch bag. Alternatively, place the written directions for an activity in each bag. Cue the dog to wait while the handler, school professional, or the student place the bags a short distance away from the dog. The handler, school professional or the student will cue the dog to select a bag, and the dog will touch the bag with their nose or paw. The student will then complete the activity listed in the bag.

Modifications

- Write encouraging notes from the dog to the student (i.e., “fluffy sees you working hard and believes in you!”).
- The bags can be hidden around the room. Ask the handler to walk around the corner with the dog while the student hides the bags in places where it is safe for the dog to seek them. The dog then returns to the room and searches for the bags.

Precautions

The student may feel anxious about the mystery activities in bags. If this is the case, allow the student to choose which activities will be placed in the bags.

Dog Perspective

Some dogs may try to chew/consume the lunch bag. The animal handler should be ready to trade the bag for a very motivating treat in case this happens. If the bags are hidden, a treat in the bag can make this easier for the dog to find.

Required Dog Skills

Ability to target a lunch bag. Watch the video below for more information on training this skill.

[What's in the bag?](#)

